

Central Intelligence Agency

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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

31 August 1984

MOSCOW COURTS THE ARAB MODERATESSummary

The Soviets are attempting to capitalize on Arab frustration with US policy by increasing contacts with moderate Arab governments and refloating their longstanding proposal for an international conference on the Middle East. They have achieved modest improvement in relations with Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait and Lebanon, but their gains are likely to be limited by the moderates' continuing ties with the US and suspicion of ultimate Soviet motives. [redacted]

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Moreover, the Soviets have to be careful not to alienate Syria, which jealously guards its own position in Lebanon, is hostile toward Egypt and Jordan and skeptical about an international conference in the absence of any prospect of Israeli concessions. The Kremlin probably recognizes that it is unlikely any time soon to reconcile Syria, Libya and the Arab moderates and forge a united Arab coalition opposed to the US and

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Israel or gain an independent role in the peace process. Thus, Moscow will pursue openings with the moderates, but not at the expense of complicating relations with Syria--the centerpiece of its overall Middle Eastern strategy. [redacted]

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The Soviets have been unusually active with Arab moderates this summer. They have:

- Sent a military sales delegation to Jordan and received visits by the Jordanian Armed Forces Commander-in-Chief and Prime Minister.
- Announced the exchange of ambassadors with Egypt after a three-year hiatus.
- Hosted a visit by Kuwaiti Defense Minister Salim al-Sabah, following which they signed an arms deal.
- Hosted visits by Lebanese factional leaders (and cabinet ministers) Walid Junblatt and Nabih Barri.
- Sent senior Foreign Ministry official Polyakov to Lebanon and Jordan.

In addition, on 29 July the Kremlin reissued its longstanding proposal for an international conference on the Arab-Israeli question at which the USSR would play a prominent role. The new proposal differed only slightly from those the Soviets announced in September 1982 and February 1981. [redacted]

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Background

Moscow has long sought to broaden its base of influence in the Middle East beyond such radical/rejectionist states as Syria, Libya and South Yemen by courting moderate Arab governments. Optimally, the Soviets hope to forge a united Arab front of radicals and moderates that would follow a pro-Soviet and anti-Israeli/anti-US course. At a minimum, they seek to weaken the moderates' ties to Washington. The USSR recognizes that states such as Egypt and Jordan occupy key positions in the Arab-Israeli dispute and that it will be difficult to gain a role in any Arab-Israeli peace negotiations--a major Soviet objective--without their support or acquiescence. [redacted]

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Following the 1973 war and throughout the rest of the 1970s and early 1980s, Soviet efforts to woo the moderates met with little success. Egypt realigned with the US and, under Camp David, signed a peace treaty with Israel. Jordan continued its

close relationship with the US, although it refused to join the Camp David peace process and bought some arms from the Soviets. Lebanon was in continuous turmoil and heavily influenced by Syria and Israel, neither of which wanted to see an increase in Soviet influence in the country. Soviet approaches to other Arab moderates, such as Saudi Arabia, fell on deaf ears. The sole exception was Kuwait, with which the Soviets developed a good political relationship and the beginnings of a military one. []

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Recently, however, US setbacks in Lebanon and increased support for Israel, coupled with the stagnation of the Arab-Israeli peace process, have created opportunities for Moscow. The Arab moderates resented what they saw as a US failure to prevent Israel's invasion of Lebanon in June 1982 and subsequently blamed Washington for not pressuring Tel Aviv hard enough to withdraw its troops. They criticized the US for getting involved in fighting with Lebanese factions and Syrian forces in the fall of 1983, and then viewed the abrupt pullout of US Marines in February as a demonstration of Washington's lack of resolve in supporting its friends in the Middle East. []

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The moderates also criticize what they see as an increasing US tilt toward Israel, especially the revival last fall of the 1981 US-Israeli "strategic cooperation" agreement. Jordan and Kuwait, in particular, blame their failure to obtain US Stinger anti-aircraft missiles earlier this year on an increased US bias toward Israel and a tendency to take the Arabs for granted. []

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In the moderates' eyes, this greater US support for Israel is a major reason for the derailment of the Arab-Israeli peace process. They see no chance for progress until Israel halts new settlements on the occupied West Bank and withdraws its forces from Lebanon. They believe that the US is not concerned enough about these issues and are frustrated over Washington's refusal to deal with the PLO. []

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Moscow made its first attempts to exploit this recent Arab displeasure with the US in the spring. It sent the CPSU's top Middle Eastern specialist, Karen Brutents, to Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Kuwait and the chief of the Foreign Ministry's Near East Department, Vladimir Polyakov, to Egypt. Those visits apparently laid the groundwork for Moscow's recent advances. []

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Egypt

The exchange of ambassadors was announced on 6 July. Egypt's ambassador arrived in Moscow on 23 August, while his Soviet counterpart is due in Cairo in early September. The move was a long time in the making. Former President Sadat had withdrawn Egypt's ambassador in 1977 and expelled the Soviet

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ambassador in 1981 after charging him with interfering in Egyptian internal affairs. Soon after President Mubarak took office in October 1981, he began to take small steps to normalize relations. The Kremlin was ready at any time to return the ambassadors, but Cairo was in no hurry to proceed. [redacted]

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The exchange modestly improves the Soviets' standing in the most populous Arab country, which they have long considered to be the center of the Arab world. The USSR's loss of influence in Egypt in the mid-1970s was a severe blow to Soviet fortunes in the Middle East, but Moscow probably harbors no illusions that the exchange of ambassadors will lead to a revival of its close pre-1972 political and military relationship with Cairo. Egyptian leaders have stated publicly that they are not prepared to reduce Egypt's strong political, military and economic ties to the US, and they remain wary of the Soviets and their potential for meddling in Egyptian domestic politics. Nevertheless, the Soviets probably hope that improved relations will convince Egypt to accept a direct Soviet role in the Arab-Israeli peace process, or at least refrain from pursuing a solely US-brokered solution. [redacted]

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Egypt's need for spare parts for its large inventory of Soviet arms may provide the best opportunity for early Soviet inroads. The Egyptian military, [redacted] is dismayed by the high cost and slow delivery of US weapons and hopes now to be able to obtain Soviet spare parts as well as new weapons systems. [redacted]

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[redacted] in early August and offered to refurbish the Air Forces' fleet of MIG-21s. The Soviets curtailed arms deliveries to Egypt after 1976 but continued to provide small amounts of spare parts and military trucks. Despite the Egyptians' dissatisfaction with US aid and need for Soviet spare parts, however, their negative experience with Moscow in the 1970s and strategic interest in maintaining good ties with the US are likely to constrain them from reestablishing an extensive arms relationship with the USSR. [redacted]

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Moscow for its part, almost certainly would move quickly to meet a new Egyptian request for weapons. Egypt's outstanding debt to the USSR of approximately \$2.5 billion for past arms purchases, however, could be a major obstacle. The Soviets may demand that Cairo begin making at least small payments on the debt before they sell it additional equipment. [redacted]

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Jordan

King Hussein's frustration with US policy has provided an opening for Moscow. The trigger for his public criticism of

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[redacted]

Washington beginning in March was the Administration's withdrawal of a request to Congress to sell Jordan Stinger air defense missiles. But Hussein has said publicly that this was only the latest sign of a US tilt toward Israel and against the Arabs. He is particularly concerned about the US-Israeli "strategic cooperation" agreement and what he sees as Washington's inability or unwillingness to convince Tel Aviv to halt construction of new Jewish settlements on the West Bank. Hussein has stated publicly that he can no longer depend upon the US to achieve an Arab-Israeli settlement and has been more adamant than in the past in calling for a Soviet role in the peace process. He has also said in public that Jordan will "minimize reliance on the United States in the field of arms" and consider purchasing air defense weapons from other countries, including the Soviet Union. [redacted]

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Moscow has moved quickly to exploit the King's frustration. In April it sent Brutents to Jordan, where he met with Hussein. Soviet Ambassador Nishanov told a US official that month that Moscow would seriously consider any Jordanian request for arms. A Soviet military delegation went to Jordan in June, and in early August Jordanian Commander-in-Chief Bin Shakir visited the USSR, where he had talks with a host of senior Soviet military officials. Polyakov stopped in Amman during his tour through the region and met with Hussein on 1 August. Prime Minister Obeidat traveled to the USSR in late August. [redacted]

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[redacted]

It appears increasingly likely that the two sides will sign an arms deal this year, possibly on the scale of their \$225 million agreement in 1981. Jordan appears most interested in air defense weapons to complement the small number of Soviet SA-8 surface-to-air missiles and ZSU-23/4 anti-aircraft guns it purchased in 1981. Amman may also seek advanced fighter aircraft but might be constrained by financing and the fact that this would entail a major increase in the number of Soviet military advisers and technicians in Jordan. Moscow is likely to go a long way toward accommodating Jordan's requests, although it probably would not sell its most advanced SAMs and fighters for fear they could end up in US hands. [redacted]

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The Soviets presumably realize that Jordan's ties with the US are still deep and that the King's warming to the USSR is, as similar moves have been in the past, at least partly designed to prompt changes in US policy. Nevertheless, Moscow is certain to test the limits of Hussein's willingness to improve ties while being careful not to alarm Syria. The Soviets are probably especially pleased with the King's call for a Soviet role in the peace process. For years they had sought such an explicit

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[redacted]

statement from Jordan and feared US attempts to bring Amman into the Camp David peace process. The King's statement is likely to have lessened, but not eliminated, these concerns. [redacted]

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Kuwait

The Soviets have long had cordial ties with Kuwait, but Washington's refusal to sell it Stinger missiles in June provided a new chance to widen their limited military relationship. The Kuwaitis, who worry that they may be drawn into the fighting between Iran and Iraq, are seeking air defense weapons as a signal to Tehran that an attack on Kuwait would have its costs. The extensive publicity Kuwait gave Defense Minister Salim's mid-July visit to the USSR apparently was designed to send such a signal and prod the US to be more forthcoming on arms. [redacted]

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Salim told US officials before his visit that he would sign a deal for additional FROG-7 surface-to-surface missiles. While in Moscow, he stated publicly that he had initialed an agreement and that a Soviet military delegation would soon go to Kuwait to work out the details. According to the Kuwaiti news service, a Soviet delegation signed an arms deal in Kuwait on 15 August. It is unclear whether this deal was for the FROGs or for other weapons. [redacted]

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As with Jordan, the Soviets presumably are eager to expand their military relations with Kuwait, but probably would be constrained from providing their most advanced systems by the risk that the equipment would fall into US hands. Moscow probably also hopes that an enhanced military relationship with Kuwait will improve Soviet prospects for diplomatic gains with other conservative Persian Gulf states. Soviet media were quick to replay statements by Kuwaiti media during Salim's visit that the other Gulf states should establish relations with the USSR. Kuwait has in the past lobbied for this in Gulf Cooperation Council forums. [redacted]

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Lebanon

The Soviets have attempted to take advantage of the withdrawal of US Marines from Lebanon in February to increase their own influence but continue to defer to Syria there. Moscow sent Brutents to Lebanon in April, and he met with President Gemayel and other Lebanese leaders. Druze leader Junblatt and Amal chief Barri visited the USSR in July. Moscow has long maintained ties with the two factional leaders, particularly Junblatt, and apparently hopes they will promote closer Soviet-Lebanese relations in their new roles as cabinet ministers. At the same time, the Soviets, by cultivating their relationships with the factional leaders, are hedging their bets should Lebanese efforts to create a strong central government fail. [redacted]

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Polyakov went to Lebanon in early August and met with Foreign Minister Turk and Prime Minister Karami. Beirut rejected a Soviet request to send a military official along with Polyakov, according to the Lebanese Charge in Moscow. A Lebanese Foreign Ministry official told US Embassy officers that Polyakov focused on next month's UN General Assembly session as well as Moscow's Arab-Israeli peace initiative. The Lebanese official claimed that the discussions were pro forma. [redacted]

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The Soviets evidently are satisfied with the new government headed by Karami. Their media have carried only favorable comments about it. Karami, who is tied closely to the Syrians, has a much more pro-Soviet attitude than previous prime ministers. Moscow presumably welcomed his public statement in late July that he would have no reservations about purchasing Soviet arms and his early August endorsement of the Soviet peace initiative. [redacted]

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Peace Process

The new Soviet peace proposal repeats with only a few changes the six points contained in the Brezhnev proposal of September 1982 (see Annex), which differed only slightly from Brezhnev's February 1981 plan. The most significant addition is an endorsement of the proposed new Palestinian state's right to form a confederation, apparently designed to make the proposal more appealing to PLO leader Arafat and Jordan. [redacted]

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The initiative includes the most detailed elaboration Moscow has ever issued of the mechanics of the projected international conference at which these points would be negotiated. Most of the details are not new. They follow closely Moscow's plan for the December 1973 Geneva Conference on the Arab-Israeli question and appear aimed at preventing a repeat of what happened then, when the US outmaneuvered the Soviets and brokered separate Israeli-Egyptian and Israeli-Syrian agreements. The stipulations, for example, that all agreements negotiated in bilateral meetings at the conference be subject to ratification by all participants and that the six points are "organically intertwined" would block the achievement of anything less than a comprehensive settlement. The Soviets probably decided to publish the details of the mechanics of such a conference in an official document to give their proposal the appearance of being a major new initiative. [redacted]

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The timing of Moscow's repackaging of its peace proposal appears to have been linked to the widespread speculation in the Middle East prior to the Israeli election that a new Labor government might revive Arab-Israeli peace negotiations. The

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[redacted]

Soviets probably wanted to be in a position to claim a role if such negotiations should take place. They probably also hoped to capitalize on recent more explicit calls by Jordan and Egypt for a Soviet role in the peace process and to counter US claims that the USSR cannot play a constructive role. [redacted]

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Moscow has long sought a seat at any Arab-Israeli negotiations with status equal to that of Washington. This would be an acknowledgement by the United States and the states in the region of the Soviet Union's "legitimate role" as a major power in the Middle East. More concretely, it would enhance the Soviets' ability to block any US-sponsored settlement that contained terms they believed to be harmful to their interests.

[redacted]

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Despite their new proposal, the Soviets almost certainly do not believe conditions are ripe for convening an international conference. Soviet officials have acknowledged as much in public and private during recent months. A Soviet Foreign Ministry official stated at a press conference for Arab newsmen in Moscow in early August that the Soviets "are well aware" that the proposal will not be immediately accepted by all parties and that convening a conference will not be easy. In April, the Soviet Ambassador to Jordan told a US official that splits among the Arabs and uncertainty over the US and Israeli elections made chances for forward movement in the peace process in the near future virtually nil. Labor's failure to win a clear mandate in the Israeli election further reduces the chances. [redacted]

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Nonetheless, the Soviets evidently hope to use their new proposal as a vehicle to inject themselves into regional peace negotiations, improve ties with moderate Arab states and place the US on the defensive. Judging by the Soviets' handling of their initiative thus far and statements of Soviet officials, we can expect it to be a focal point of their Middle Eastern diplomacy in the next few months. Soviet diplomats worldwide are promoting the peace plan, and Moscow has submitted it as an official UN document. Foreign Minister Gromyko is certain to lobby for the proposal when he attends the opening of the UN General Assembly session in late September. It looks increasingly likely that the Soviets will attempt to have their plan considered in formal Security Council or General Assembly sessions, although they have given conflicting signals in discussions with Arab and US diplomats. Linking it to Secretary General Perez de Cuellar's proposal for a similar Arab-Israeli peace conference may be the most convenient way of tabling the Soviet initiative.

[redacted]

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Outlook

The recent gains the Soviets have made with moderate Arabs, while modest, build the groundwork for further advances. The upcoming reported Soviet exchange of visits with each country should provide opportunities for solidifying the current improvement in bilateral ties. As long as the moderates' frustration with US policy continues, they will remain open to Soviet blandishments. The likely further stagnation of the peace process is certain to add to Arab disappointment with the US. Moscow probably hopes that its "new" peace proposal will convince the moderates--especially King Husein--to give more than rhetorical support to a Soviet role in the peace process. [REDACTED]

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There are limitations, however, on the improvement of Soviet relations with the Arab moderates. Each has, to varying degrees, important political, economic, and military links with the US. None are ready to jettison these ties or throw in their lot with the Soviet Union. Indeed, a major factor behind each country's recent dealings with Moscow has been a desire to jolt Washington into paying greater heed to their policy concerns. [REDACTED]

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Soviet relations with Syria also limit the USSR's room for maneuver with the Arab moderates. Moscow has to be careful not to move too boldly in expanding its influence in Lebanon because the Syrians regard it as their legitimate sphere of influence and have clashed with the Kremlin on the issue in the past. The unusual withdrawal in July of an article carried by the "unofficial" Soviet news agency Novosti offering Soviet help in training and equipping the Lebanese Army suggests Moscow wanted to avoid overstepping the Syrians. The Lebanese Charge' in Moscow told US officials in late July he thinks Damascus is displeased with the recent increase in Soviet-Lebanese contacts. [REDACTED]

In addition, Syria regards Egypt and Jordan as hostile or indifferent to Syrian interests and will be leery of any Soviet improvement in ties with those countries. Although the Soviets probably would try to convince Damascus that they are attempting to draw Cairo and Amman away from the US, they will not risk alienating Syria for uncertain gains in Egypt and Jordan. [REDACTED]

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The Soviet goal of creating a united Arab front opposed to Israel and the US appears no closer to fruition. Syria remains isolated among the Arabs. Only Libya and South Yemen--two other pro-Soviet regimes--firmly support it, and neither counts for much in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The continuing rift within the PLO, the feud between PLO leader Arafat and Syrian President Assad and Syria's refusal to come to terms with Iraq or Egypt all make the possibility of Arab unity as remote as ever. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

The Soviets, despite their close ties with Syria, have been unable to convince Damascus to soften its positions. The Syrians have rebuffed Soviet efforts to get them to mend ties with Arafat and Iraq. [REDACTED]

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Moreover, Damascus, while paying lip service to Moscow's proposed international conference, has never thought much of the idea. It refused to attend the 1973 Geneva Conference or support its reconvening in 1977, when Moscow and Washington jointly issued a call for resumption of the talks. The Syrians evidently believe it is not in their interest to begin negotiations unless the Arabs achieve a consensus favorable to Syrian aims or the US appears willing to force Israel to make concessions. In any case, the Syrians are highly sensitive to what they regard as US or Soviet attempts to dictate a peace settlement. [REDACTED]

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Moscow's overwhelming dependence on Syria for influence in the Middle East hampers its ability to develop ties with other Arabs. The Soviets are not comfortable with this constraint and have been willing to risk some frictions with Damascus--for example, over Arafat's dispute with Syria. But the Arafat-Assad feud also highlights Syria's predominance in Soviet policy. After failing to convince Damascus last November to mend fences with the PLO chief, the Soviets backed off and began to emphasize publicly the need for Arafat to come to terms with Syria. Thus, although the Kremlin will pursue its recent successes with Arab moderates, the continuing centrality of Syria to Soviet Middle Eastern policy almost certainly will prompt Moscow to defer to Damascus when these approaches clash with Syrian interests. [REDACTED]

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Annex

29 JULY 1984 SOVIET PROPOSAL FOR ARAB-ISRAELI PEACE SETTLEMENT

(Underlined points not in Soviets' 15 September 1982 proposal)

The following six "principles" should be negotiated at an international conference. The conference would be attended by Israel, Syria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, the PLO, the US, the USSR, and by "some" other states from the Middle East and from "areas adjoining it" capable of making a "positive contribution."

1. Israeli withdrawal from all Arab territories seized in 1967 and after. Recognition of inviolability of new borders. Israeli settlements established on Arab territory after 1967 should be dismantled.
2. Creation of a Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip. A short transition phase during which the UN administers the territories is acceptable. The new state has the right to form a confederation.
3. East Jerusalem incorporated into the new Palestinian state.
4. All states in the region guaranteed the right to a secure and independent existence and development.
5. An end to the state of war between Israel and the Arab states and a commitment by all parties to respect each other's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity and to resolve disputes peacefully.
6. Guarantee of the settlement by the permanent members of the UN Security Council or the Council as a whole. The Soviet Union is ready to participate in such guarantees.

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